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ABSTRACT

Although the American work force is generally better educated than ever before, the general productivity of American workers continues to drop. This trend indicates that too many people are unable to cope with the demands placed on them to organize, evaluate, and communicate information to each other. In order to better prepare citizens for life in a fast-paced society, changes in education are necessary. Teaching as a transmission of an organized body of knowledge must be replaced with instruction in the process of organizing knowledge. Since thinking requires language ability, a society shifting from industrial to information production and requiring new educational methods that enhance language ability places a greater burden upon the teacher, both as an instructor and as a model language user. Unfortunately, the most able students on college campuses major in law or engineering or medicine, and many students who prepare to be teachers are not the brightest or the most talented. Whatever the reasons that have been identified as causes for the decline in the quality of students who select teaching as a career, the result is the same: the quality of teaching suffers. (DF)

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The Uneducated Educator

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Abstract: The decline in the quality of people entering and staying in K-12 teaching affect their ability to teach language, thinking and communication, abilities necessary for life in an information society.

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The Uneducated Educator

In Megatrends, John Naisbitt identifies ten trends reshaping our society. One, which he refers to as the "most subtle, yet explosive," is the shift from the industrial to he information society.1 Approximately half of the American payroll now creates or manipulates symbols rather than producing things.2 For example, 6,000 to 7,000 scientific articles are written every day. This publicationrate means that scientific knowledge increases about 13% per year; or, ALL scientific knowledge that people ever have produced doubles every 5.5 years.3 Even the rate of scientific knowledge production has increased. In the early 1970's, knowledge was doubling about every 8 years. Now, 5 1/2 years. With the spread of computer accessibility and the renewed emphasis upon science education, scientific knowledge expects to begin doubling every 20 months within the near future.4 ALL that we know about certain fields then doubles in about the same time a baby is born, takes her first steps and reaches out for "mama."

The second trend is the shift from a representative to a participatory democracy. Naisbitt particularly points to the corporate world where employee demands for involvement in decision making has changed the workplace.5 The demand for involvement naturally follows the increasing education level of the American workforce. Over 75% of today's employees have high school diplomas and over half have a smattering of education beyond high school.[6]

The two trends connect in their impact upon the average worker. While the workforce is better educated, the general productivity of the American work continues to drop. Dr. Vincent Giuliano argues productivity will

increaseonly if investment is made in developing the handling of information and the improvement of communication skills through formal and continuing education.7 Despite accomplishment in school, the individual worker cannot manage the information available in the workplace.

Part of the difficulty, according to Robin M. Hogarth, has cause in the uncertainty of circumstances within which people have to make decisions.8 The increase in information increases the uncertainty as a greater number of alternative interpretations of data and resultant choices are available. The result of the increased uncertainty are errors in thinking, errors caused by attempts to reduce the uncertainty. He identifies five errors. First, the error or randomness. Assuming events have connections when they do not. Second, giving data too much weight. Third, ignoring background information in favor of present, specific data. Fourth, confusing the reliability of an information source with the predictive ability of the source (prediction requires some concept of the future, an anticipation of consequences, and not all sources have the same ability). Fifth, depending too much upon individual memory for the specific information. Memory, by its very nature, is selective and biased toward hindsight.9

In short, argues Douglas Carter, a senior fellow at the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, the problem stems from an abundance of information inadequately assimiliated.10 What people need to know is how to collect, sift, evaluate and verify information.[11]

But, more is needed than the collection and verification of information in order to live within a uncertain world dominated by information. We need

the ability to communicate the results of our efforts to others, to cooperate with them, and to differ without being disagreeable.12

Two trends have been identified (change to an information society, change to a participatory democracy workplace) with consequent demands placed upon people to organize, evaluate and communicate information to each other. Further, since information creates alternatives, people need to communicate out of differencebut not necessary to disagreement and conflict. These changes require changes in education, the institution which seeks to prepare the populace for the future.

The kind of education needed replaces teaching as a transmission of organized body of knowledge with the teaching of the process of organizing knowledge. Or, education needs to change from "teaching content and what to learn, to teaching process and how to learn."13 In a sense, the teaching of thinking.

"Thinking stems from the innate ability of the mind to form patterns, mental structures of concepts, objects, events, processes and relationships." Three broad classes of thinking have been identified. Basic Operations consists of observation, correspondence, classification, and serialization. Integrated Operations consists of the compensatory, proporational, probabilitic, and correlational thinking. Complex Strategies are based upon a basic inquiry strategy which can be adapted to suit problems recurring in our culture. That basic strategy requires the thinker to define a problem, search for answers, generate ideas, evaluate them, and repeat the process until a satisfactory conclusion is found.[15]

Thinking requires language ability. The Basic Operations of observation and classification assume a classification system utilizing characteristics.

Both the specification of class and description of characteristics necessitates a vocabulary precise enough to make distinctions. Integrated Operations requires language abilities permitting variability -- being able to think more than one way. Complex Strategies requires language precision in the description of problems and the ability to change metaphors in order to generate new solutions.

Lack of the language ability affects an individual's ability to think, which affects the upper limit of occupational development, at least in the business world. U.S. corporation executives cited imagination, leadership, good judgment and the ability to motivate people as the most important qualifications for promotion. They rate "integrity" as the most important quality of a CEO. And, they rate "limited point of view" as the major weakness of subordinates desiring to rise in the corporate structure. The "inability to understand others" rates second.16 "Point of view" and the "understanding of others" directly relate to an individuals ability with language. Language enables us to bypass our own egocentricity to take the perspective of others.17

A society shifting from industrial to information production, requiring a new means of education, education based upon an enhancement of language ability, places a greater burden upon the teacher, as a teacher and as model of language use. With this background of demands, what kind of person becomes the teacher to prepare students for this changing world?

> A key area (in reorganizing high schools) is teacher training. Schoolteachers, after all, are college graduates. Yet on most campuses, it's not a matter of prestige to say you're going to be a teacher. That's not what our best students do. They go into medicine, or law or engineering. For years now, the

> students majoring in teaching have performed close to the lower edge of standardized testing in many of our students. Yet they're the ones who are preparing the next generation. What colleges ought to be saying to their gifted students is this: `The most important thing you can do is to go into the schools and teach young children.'[18]

In the National Report on College-Bound Seniors, 1984, the average SAT verbal score for the country was 426, for math 471. For students expressing interest in education (4.6% of the total 878,904) the national verbal average was 398, math 425. While the 1984 scores are up for the first time in 8 years, those intersted in education scored in the bottom third. Only students interested in "ethnic studies," "art" and "home economics" scored lower than education-bound students.19 In Indiana, high school seniors interested in education scored verbal 394 and math 426, both below the national average. Only art, forestry, ethnic studies and trade vocation scored lower. Still, the score placed education-interested students in the bottom third.20 And, the low score of students heading into education has existed for a decade.

Into colleges and universities go the future teachers to be treated by higher education lacking rigor. The quality of higher education has deteriorated over the past 30 years. The growth of education in the 50's, the abandonment of standards in the 60's have lead to lower expectations. "When we expect little, we are seldom disappointed."21 The results are a decline in performance on the Graduate Record Exams in 11 of 15 subject areas, "primarily those that emphasize verbal skills," between 1964 and 1982.22 Those seeking advanced degrees in education score at the bottom. Education people enter college on the low end of the measures and their four years does nothing to change the comparation quality.

However, to teach demands language abilities, abilities which underpin the skills of observation, analysis and synthesis.

Five clusters of behaviors appear significant in monitoring teaching excellence:

> Analytic/Synthetic -- teacher demonstrates a willingness to carry content past pedantic preoccupations and show origins, interrelated patterns, and implications of concepts that undergird facts.
>
> Organization/Clarity-- teacher presentation of material, values, clarity, cohesiveness, sequence and, therefore, demands effective verbal skills.
>
> Instructor/Group Interaction -- teacher's ability to orchestrate effectively a group activity; to read student signals of inability and misunderstanding; to create a positive learning environment through interaction.
>
> Instructor/Individual Student Interaction -- teacher shows care for the individual student. Teacher initiates one-to-one contact.
>
> Dynamism/Enthusiasm -- teacher shows interest and love for teaching. No difference was found between the best and worst teachers on subject matter competence nor grading procedures. But the best/worst are differentiated upon the dynamic and enthusiastic manner in which they introduce students to themselves and to ideas.[23]

Notice, in every cluster, the core ability is -- use language to communicate with students.

But communication is an art requiring clarity and precision. Unless communications are clear and accurate, misunderstanding, if not conflict, results. Furthermore, correctness and precision of language are values which undergird our human relations, our faith in others including government and business.[24]

In summary, language lies at the heart of our thinking ability, our organizing ability, our connections-to-others ability. Without language used

with correctness and precision, trust (the assumption of dependability in another) cannot be assumed. Without that assumption, relations with other people and with human institutions suffer.

We as individuals need enhanced language ability. Our relationships require it. Society's smooth functioning demands it. Yet, those wishing to assumeresponsibility for teaching have a language ability lower than two-thirds of those they will teach.

Many forces have been labelled as causes for the decline in the quality of students seeking teaching as a career: low pay, poor working conditions, poor student discipline, poor community psychological and fiscal support of schools, increased opportunities for bright women. Whatever the cause of the decline, the result is the same, and my concern -- that the least qualified students of the past decade, are the tenured cadre of teachers responsible for preparing students for the rapidly changing world of tomorrow.

Notes

[1]John Naisbitt, Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives (New York: Warner Books, 1982), 1.

[2]Jack Magarrell, "The Social Repercussion of an Information Society," Chronicle of Higher Education, 20, no. 18 (June 30, 1980), 1.

[3]Naisbitt, 16.

[4]Naisbitt, 16.

[5]Naisbitt, 194.

[6]Sar A. Levitan, "The Changing Workplace," Society (September/October, 1984), 44.

[7]Time, "The Real Implications of the Information Age," vol. 115, no. 9 (March 3, 1980), special section.

[8]Dun's Review, "Decisions, Decisions, Decisions," vol. 117, no. 5 (May 1981), 99.

[9]Dun's Review, 101.

[10]Magarrell, 1.

[11]Perry Pascarella, "Looking at Work in the 21st Century," Industry Week (April 30, 1977), 32.

[12]Pascarella, 32.

[13]Robert Case and Richard Parsons, "An Educational Imperative for the Future," Education Tomorrow, vol. 3, no. 4 (August 1978), 5.

[14]Practical Applications of Research, "Can Thinking be Taught?" vol. 3, no. 1 (September 1980), 1.

[15]Practical Applications, 2.

[16]Wall Street Journal, "Executives Stress `Inner' Qualities of Bosses as Essential for Advancement" (November 11, 1980), 2-1.

[17]Jesse G. Delia, "Constructism and the Study of Human Communication," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 62 (February 1977), 66-83.

[18]U.S. News & World Report (September 8, 1980), 74.

[19]National Report on College-Bound Seniors, 1984, 1 & 18.

[20]National Report, 11.

[21]Wall Street Journal, "Reports Faulting Higher Education Are Likely to Cause Heated Debate" (October 19, 1984), 2-1.

[22]Wall Street Journal, 2-1.

[23]Insight to Teaching Excellence, "Teaching Effectiveness: A Research-Based Analysis," vol. 8, no. 1 (November 1980), 8.

[24]Harold B. Walker, "Precision is a Virtue," Chicago Tribune Magazine (October 4, 1980), 14.